Written evidence submitted by the Royal College of General Practitioners

I am responding as Joint Honorary Secretary to Council of the Royal College of General Practitioners. The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) is the largest membership organisation in the United Kingdom solely for GPs. It aims to encourage and maintain the highest standards of general medical practice and to act as the ‘voice’ of GPs on issues concerned with education; training; research; and clinical standards. Founded in 1952, the RCGP has just over 52,000 members who are committed to improving patient care, developing their own skills and promoting general practice as a discipline. In addition, the RCGP has strong links with the Defence Medical Services and very many general practitioners who work for the MoD, in either civilian or uniformed capacities are members or fellows of our college.

Given the above, we are very aware of the issues around the care of current serving personnel, their families and of veterans. It is for this reason that since 2016 we are the only Royal College that has specifically included the care of the military in our curriculum and thus has been part of our Membership examination which all doctors in the UK take as they qualify as general practitioners. This change has meant that military and veterans health is now regularly taught to young doctors as they progress through general practitioner training alongside other important matters that GPs are expected to know about. Secondly, we have had a long standing electronic educational module available for general practitioners on our website which specifically covers the care of veterans together with other resources available. In this regard we are shortly to publish a short focussed film in our “5 minutes to change your practice” series. It will be targeted at the “key points” that the NHS GP needs to know when looking after veterans and other members of the military community. This will be made available to practice teams as well as general practitioners. Thirdly we have hosted a number of other educational initiatives for general practitioners and especially around the field of mental health. Key messages have been that the vast majority of veterans transfer to civilian life with little problem, however there is a cohort who need additional support. Unfortunately we do not have specific data ourselves, however we are aware of the publications by the Kings Centre for Military Health Research. We would specifically support further work by NHS England, NHS Digital and Devolved Administrations to improve the coding of veterans and other members of the Armed Forces Community within GP computer systems which would assist in better understanding of patient need both individually and geographically. Additionally, feedback from members is that many do know of the specific veterans mental health services available, although our view is that further work is needed to ensure that this knowledge is more broadly available. We also support initiatives by NHS England to improve the transfer of clinical notes into the NHS as service personnel leave the services and register with an NHS general practitioner. Finally, we currently have a pilot project with NHS England in the West Midlands to accredit NHS GP Surgeries as “veteran friendly”. The Midland Faculty of the RCGP is the lead, not least that within our structure, the Midland Faculty has the specific expertise for military and veterans issues. To date we have 83 surgeries signed up for this important initiative and we expect this number to increase. We have developed a set of support material for surgeries which have included “Top Tips for the GP” on looking after veterans and the military community as well as “Top Tips for Veterans: how to get the most from your GP”. We can forward this information upon request. After due assessment and in consultation with NHS England and Devolved Health Administrations, we are happy to have discussions regarding a broader roll out.

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